

From effect to affect: narratives of passivity and modes of participation of the contemporary spectator

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Abstract: This article considers how dominant cultural and scientific notions of the body and emotions pervade narratives of a passive spectator in the western theatrical tradition. Two main conceptions of passivity model the idea of spectator in the West: one in Antiquity (passivity as receptivity) and the other in Modernity (passivity as inactivity). Theatre history demonstrates that these conceptions are intertwined with the development of theatre architecture and acting practices and theories set out to produce emotional effects on the spectator. Drawing upon Teresa Brennan's theory of affect transmission, I will be looking at how the gradual enclosure of the stage – culminating in Zola's fourth wall and Wagner's darkened auditorium – and the emphasis on the spectator as the target of theatrical effects is in line with the validity decay of cultural notions of the transmission of affect that lead to a self-contained modern subject, that is, confined to the limits of the body. I will be suggesting that the avant-garde movements in the 20th century and post-dramatic practices reactivate affective a fluid connection between performers and spectators that value affect transmission as vital to live events, both as social process and aesthetic material.

Keywords: Affect, Spectator, Passivity, Participation, Theatre Architecture, Transmission, Emotion, Effect

How does an actor generate emotions on stage? Are they real or fake? Are they a result of inspiration or technique? How does s/he play them to have an effect on the audience? These questions have been key to theoretical debates about the actor's craft in the Western tradition. At the core of this debate lies emotion – medium and mediator of the theatrical experience. Yet, the physical encounter between actors and spectators is culturally determined.

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Therefore, the labor of the actor can reveal how different historical and cultural moments encapsulate theories of emotion grounded in conceptions of the body and its behavior.

Long before interdisciplinary approaches became current, Joseph Roach published a groundbreaking study in performance studies (1985). In *The Player's Passion*, Roach examined theories of acting from ancient to modern times showing how prevalent scientific notions of the body and emotions of a given historical period infuse theatre making. The emotional effect an actor can produce in the spectator is the central craft of the actor. Changing ideas in acting theories disclose changing notions of how the body works and, consequently, what is required of the actor to master it. Likewise, they also reveal notions of perception, activity and passivity as well as disclose embedded concepts of affect transmission. The theatre is, thus, a privileged site to critically access practices of feeling.

In the past ten years, the neurosciences have inspired a proliferous number of studies aiming at understanding not only the actor's labor but also the experience of the spectator. From a broader analysis of consciousness at various stages and practices in the creative process undertaken by Meyer-Dinkgrafe in *Theatre and Consciousness* (2005), to a more specific study on the intertwined dimensions of cognition, physiology and emotion in the actor's engagement with a role carried out by Rhonda Blair in *The Actor, Image and Action* (2008), amongst others¹, many scholars have lived up to the promise of understanding theatre's mysteries by means of scientific knowledge. In light of cognitive sciences, Bruce McConachie attempts to provide a thorough examination of what happens to the spectator during a performance (2008). Claiming the failure of semiotics to provide a comprehensive terminology to grasp such an experience, *Engaging Audiences* offers interesting insights about attention, perception, imagination and empathy, underlying the spectator's activity as opposed to the passivity of the beholder (cfr. McConachie 2013). Science, however, also reflects a larger cultural and philosophical context that informs ideas of emotion and feelings, passivity and activity as well as notions regarding the transmission of affect. These authors paved the way for recent approaches to performance stressing the advantages of bridging theatre and science to a comprehensive understanding of actor training, performance and spectating foreshadowing a considerable expansion of the field (Kemp 2012; Lutterbie 2014; Shaughnessy 2014).

¹ (for a study on movement and cognition cfr. Delahunta, 2005; Delahunta, S., Barnard, P. and McGregor, W., 2009; for a study about the mask in tragedy cfr. Meineck Peter, 2011, "The Neuroscience of the Tragic Mask." *Arion* 19 (1): 113–158.).

Concurrently, in the past five to eight years there has been an increasing interest in thinking affect in performance and the performance of affect. The significant number of distinguished and emerging scholars engaging with the recent tendencies in Affect Theory in papers or panels at academic conferences (PSi, Performance Philosophy), publications, journal issues (*Theatre Research International*, *Theatre Journal*, *Senses & Society*, for instance) or course offerings is evident (Ridout 2006; 2008; Thompson 2009; Dolan 2005; Hurley 2010; Hurley, Erin e Warner 2012; Welton 2012; Manning 2009; Massumi 2002). This “felt” urgency of understanding performance through the lens of affect is particularly striking as emotions and feelings have traditionally been a major topic in theatre, dance or live performance canons, as Joseph Roach brilliantly demonstrated. Affect theory provides us with conceptual tools that can highlight aspects of the spectatorship that remain unclear. Understanding the influence of audience engagement in the unfolding of the event as both social and aesthetic is crucial to reassessing the function of the spectator’s participation.

What does affect mean? As far as affect theory goes, there is a vast array of definitions of affect, considered in opposition to emotion or feelings, at our disposal. In a deleuzian/spinozist framework, affect is a process of becoming at an impersonal level, therefore, in a continual change and flux that the body actualizes, differing from emotions in as much as they are unqualified or uncategorized forms of experience (Massumi 1995). In terms of a more psychological based approach, affect can be considered as material and concrete things that have an energetic dimension (Brennan 2004) or as a underlying motivational system (Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky e Frank 1995), biologically anchored and arguably universal. In an effort to clarify the ambiguity of affect in relation to emotion and feeling, particularly in theatre practices, Erin Hurley proposes a definition of affect as that which “happens to us” and “through us” out of our conscious control whereas emotion refers to bodily responses that organize our relational experience in the world (Hurley 2010, 22). Feelings, as cognitive science tends to posit, involve the conscious perception and interpretation of what we feel – emotions and affects. From this brief sample, finding a common definition of affect will probably be an impossible and perhaps irrelevant task. In this article, I will use the concept affect to refer to sensitive charges attached to emotions, thoughts and sensations. This enables us to distinguish affect from emotions and feelings as well as to avoid falling into recurrent dichotomies (conscious/unconscious, body/mind, thought/feeling). As I will further argue, the framework of affect theory, namely, models of affect circulation allow for an in-depth analysis of reciprocity as a focal point of audience engagement, challenging narratives of passivity in spectatorship.

Deeply rooted in the western theatrical tradition, the notion of the passive spectator is a cultural construction that can be traced back to two different moments: Antiquity and Modernity. On the one hand, in the classical tradition passivity regards a state of receptivity. It implies the idea of “suffering” from an emotion (*passio*), to literally endure the influence of emotions that come from the external world. While the actor is meant to impersonate emotions and transmit them, therefore, being in control of those emotions, at least to some extent, the spectator is exposed to emotions. Such acting idea is anchored in the philosophical theory of the rhetoric of the passions, which informs acting theories until the 18th century. On the other hand, Modernity entangles passivity with ideas of inactivity. The spectator is subjected to the representation of emotions performed by the actors; he becomes isolated and detached from the stage. Acting is regarded as a technique of sensibility that masters the body, envisioned to submit the spectator to an impacting experience. Contrary to classical tradition, which is tied up to notions of affect transmission widely accepted at that period and on a body vulnerable to the exterior world, the modern notion of an autonomous subject, built upon a self-contained body that defines one’s identity, clearly shapes the figure of the 20th century spectator. This is the moment when Affect Theory steps in.

In the seminal volume *The Transmission of Affect*, Teresa Brennan claims that cultural notions of affect transmission lost currency with the emergence of a modern autonomous subject. A gradual historical process, initiated in the Enlightenment, generates a notion of an emotionally and psychologically contained individual. As the body becomes the locus where emotions are generated as responses to inner and outer stimuli, it defines the limits of subjectivity in relation to others and to the environment. Consequently, affect transmission no longer holds as a valid understanding of emotion for theatre or science. Interestingly, the evolution of theatre architecture in the West reflects this movement of closure of the subject. From the open-air amphitheater in Antiquity to the darkened auditorium of the end of the 19th century theatre, the stage is progressively enclosed and separated from the audience. If the citizens of the *polis* were allowed to express themselves freely during the *City Dionisya* festivals, in modern auditoriums the audience is seating still in silence and in darkness. Yet, both the historical avant-garde from the early 20th century and the performance art from the 60s/70s have been keen on breaking down aesthetic paradigms – contexts, structures, materials and processes – in order to reactivate a two-way connection with the spectator, putting him/her at the center of the experience. Sharing the legacy of such artistic endeavors, contemporary

practices ignite a space of interaction between a participant spectator and a performer presents himself/herself on stage. This conception of a space of interaction is also entangled in prevalent scientific and cultural concepts.

In this article, I will be suggesting that theatre activates practices of feeling encapsulated in cultural and scientific knowledge about the body and emotions. This will be done in two movements. First, I will be looking at how the gradual enclosure of the stage in the theatrical tradition is in close connection with the validity decay of cultural notions of the transmission of affect, as advanced by Teresa Brennan, considering three pivotal moments in acting theory and spectatorship – antiquity and the rhetoric of passions, 18th century and Diderot's the paradox of the actor, late 19th century with Richard Wagner and Emile Zola. Beginning in the 17th century, this slow process resolves by the end of the 19th century with the modern subject, an autonomous self-contained individual. Zola's naturalist 4th wall (an invisible wall that separates the stage from the audience to represent "life as it is") and Wagner's darkening of the auditorium culminate the process. For this purpose, I will draw a comparative analysis between the historical conceptions of the circulation of affect, as proposed by Teresa Brennan, and the history of stage architecture and acting theories considering the work of emotion and the production of emotional effects. Secondly, I will be pointing at concepts of participation and spaces of interaction in contemporary theatre in the wake of postdramatic theatre, which aim at reactivating a reciprocal movement of affect transmission between actors and spectators regardless of theatrical architecture. Inspired by the work of Joseph Roach, I will be contrasting current scientific notions of perception as action, the mind's plasticity and the interdependent engagement of body and environment with post-dramatic concepts of audience participation to provide a contextual frame for the contemporary spectator.

This is not, however, an essay in theatre history neither am I not a theatre historian. I will be referring to several conventional assumptions in theatre history and quoting extensively the inspiring work of Joseph Roach but this article will probably not add much to theatre history. Rather it will complicate it. My aim is not to problematize those conventions (the actual relation between theories and practices of acting, for instance) but to reassess them through affect theory, namely, through models of affect circulation because they can disclose aspects of affective experience that have been largely neglected in theatre studies. As an elusive phenomenon crucial to impacting the spectator, emotion pervades theories of acting often picking up dominant scientific/cultural conceptions. I am interested in the macro perspective those theories provide to thinking narratives of passivity in the theatre and the role of affect

as social process and aesthetic material. Considering that paradigmatic shifts do not happen overnight, the validity of cultural assumptions is not confined to historical periods of emergence, which is apparent in several theoreticians' texts. The issue, however, is how those texts (and corresponding practices) illuminate the value attributed to affect transmission in the theatre as inherent to the spectator's participation in the theatrical event. In this sense, I will be looking at audience engagement as shaped by scenic space and acting theories through the lens of affect theory, highlighting the performativity of spectator's participation in the theatrical event. My aim is to underline the significant echoes of the cultural process of enclosing subjectivity in a self-contained body in theatre practices and, consequently, to point out the potential political, ethical and aesthetic rebound of theatre in shaping modes of affecting and being affected by others, in short, in challenging modes of being together.

The transmission of affect in the theatre

American philosopher and social theorist Teresa Brennan brought forth a theory that gives a provocative insight into the transmission of affect (2004). Recuperating a philosophical tradition of passions as emotional states that circulate and visit us, Brennan claims that emotions are not (only) ours. Rather, they result from an inter-subjective exchange with the environment and the others. Social in origin, the transmission of affect impacts the biology of the body as, for Brennan, affect is *the physiological shift accompanying a judgment* (2004, 5). Different from emotions (as universal categories) and feelings (as awareness of bodily states), Brennan chooses the term affect to emphasize the imprecise though concrete materiality of felt experience (what happens in/to the body) as well as the energetic dimension it entails (what happens between bodies)². In this text, I will use the term affect to refer to sensitive charges attached to emotions, thoughts or sensations, which enables us not only to distinguish it from emotions and feelings but also to avoid falling into recurrent dichotomies (conscious/unconscious, body/mind).

Contrary to the scientific conceptions of emotions as expressions of a self-contained body, Brennan argues that we are open beings who receive and emit signals socially. Who, claims the author, would deny having felt, at least once, the atmosphere of a room? (Brennan 2004, 1). This is part of our everyday

² Although progressively using affect to refer to negative affects, Brennan admits affect does not differ greatly from emotion.

experience. Using arguments deriving from the philosophical history of emotions, neuroendocrinology experiences on empathy, clinic practice and crowd theory, Brennan claims that we perceive signs through the senses in contact with the others and with the environment. This perception is a form of “living attention” interpreting and connecting bodily knowledge with verbal cognitive processes. We are permeable to affects of others and to the environment because we have the capacity to transmit and receive them. For Brennan, transmission is the social process of projection or introjection of affect that has consequences in the physiology of the body. Entrainment – the alignment of two or more people nervous systems that incites common affective responses at play in neuroendocrinology systems (idem, 52) – is one of most salient mechanisms of transmission in Brennan’s study underlying how one can influence or be influenced in a distance by someone’s emotional states or by charged atmospheres. Just like actors do. Considering affect as a performative force at play in social encounters, I will be arguing that the “magic” of theatre lies in heightening the circulation of affect that emerges from collective processes in the artistic context of a performance.

The implications of this social model of circulation of affect are significant. If biology defines the modern subject’s identity in a positivist approach, collective processes of emotional exchange with others and with environment suggest that borders are unstable. Skin separates the body from the environment whereas the social permeates the way that body feels. The biological limits of the body do not contain our identity. Thus, Brennan’s theory breaks through the limits of the body as the original site of emotions and container of identities, challenging the borders between the social and the biological as well as between the individual and the environment. Likewise, in the theatre, the spectator as a receptive porous body immersed in the environment changes into a silent and inactive figure, separated from the stage, however, subjected to the emotional effects.

According to Brennan, the transmission of affect was a popular notion widely shared by the common sense as well as by philosophers, scientists and physicians, until the 17th century. When the Enlightenment paradigm postulates reason as the only capacity to generate rigorous knowledge, the transmission of affect fails to hold its prominent place. Prompted by the extreme technological developments in the turn of the 19th century, scientific knowledge postulated the biological body as the source of vitality and identity of the human being. Yet, positivist methodology – observation, experimentation and demonstration – was incompatible with the volatile nature of affective and emotional phenomena. It could not be seen through the microscope.

On the contrary, the body's behavior and physiology, namely in what regards the expression of emotions, could be observed. Hence, it becomes the original site of emotional phenomena. Although considered as resulting from cultural and geographic contexts as well as hereditary factors, the body becomes immune to social and affective environments. The transmission of affect, Brennan further sustains, has no valid theoretical ground to stand as much as social acceptance from the moment the body became an exclusively biological determination. Theatrical experience, however, provides evidence of the interplay between the biological, the social and the aesthetic.

Blood, spirits and architecture

Passions, so the ancient named emotions, are passive states. One suffers (*passio*) the action of emotions inflicted onto oneself. The work of the actor is to master the expression of such passions, felt through the body, and transmit them to the audience. Although the etymology of the term conveys the direction of such movement - from inside to outside (*e-moveo*)-, in the classical period emotion had a life of its own. Emotions were wandering entities that temporarily penetrated and transformed one's body and spirit. They did not define one's identity; they paid a visit. Therefore, emotions were envisaged as transmissible. Passions claims receptivity from a physiological and spiritual point of view, as the body is regarded to be permeable to natural environment in connection with the cosmos. According to the system of the rhetoric of the passions that dominated ancient oratory and theatre, the actor and the spectator are receptive to emotional states. The actor transmits and influences the spectator via the impersonation of passions in a distance. He is required to undergo a complete transformation in order to "irradiate" emotions over the bodies of spectators (Roach 1985, 27-8). According to Roman rector Quintiliano, the actor has to invoke images - *visiones* - making them present to his imagination. Inspired by these *visiones*, the actor could then animate his words and display bodily expressions (Quintiliano apud Roach 1985, 24). In fact, the actor more than the spectator is exposed to the dangerous power of emotions, as his body is the channel of transmission.

The rhetoric of the passions is anchored in shared popular and philosophical beliefs prevalent until the Renaissance. According to medical knowledge and superstitions, emotions originate in a precise body action: inspiration. Spirits and gods flutter in thin air and can be physically inspired and embodied, only then expressed or transformed. The philosophical theory

of *pneumatism* explains such beliefs. The *pneuma* is defined as a vital force that animates beings through an exchange with the external world. As spirits that permeate bodies through blood circulation, the *pneuma* can be literally inhaled and exhaled. They circulate from the heart to the rest of the body, hence explaining physiological manifestations (blushing or sighing, for instance) (Roach 1985, 27). *Pneumatism* is influential on Galen, the anatomist whose physiology theories (three varieties of *pneuma* and four humors) will sustain the foundations of medical expertise throughout the Renaissance. Emotions, thus, displayed bodily expressions through the action of gods and spirits in motion.

If emotions travel on air, winds are dangerous too. The amphitheaters' architecture confirms the general suspicion about the contagious and potentially lethal power of emotions. In chapters III to IX of book 5 of the first architecture treaty of Western civilization, Vitruvius presents a set of technical instructions to control and optimize the acoustic of buildings, regarding the location of its construction as well as spatial organization schemes. Theatre should be built in "a site as healthy as possible":

For at the play citizens with their wives and children remain seated in their enjoyment; their bodies motionless with pleasure have the pores opened. On these the breath of the wind falls, and if it comes from marshy districts or other infected quarters, it will pour harmful spirits into the system. (Vitruvius 1931, 263–5).³

These points to basic health care rules as precise criterion for theatre construction. Choosing a location carefully, says Vitruvius, avoids "infection". Aware of the implications of breath and blood circulation in the rhetoric of the passions it is easy to imagine that we could either be physically or spiritually "infected" in the open-air theatre. Protecting bodies from contamination, the architect should contribute to eliminate potential threats hovering the empathic and porous spectator. Abandoning himself to theatrical delight, the spectator is unaware of potential emotional dangers, putting reason on hold, which could, according to Plato, provide neither good decisions nor happiness. Instead, emotional contagion as an effect of *mimesis*, was to be

³ The English translation is more descriptive of the organics of the circulation of emotions (the word choice "spirits" and "system" points to the circulatory system through which emotions invade spectators attending a performance), whereas the Portuguese translation is more poetic. It implies the system (*veins* instead of *pores*; *infusing vapors* instead of *pour / system*), stressing the idea of exposure of the body to delight (Vitruvius, 2006 *Tratado de Arquitectura*. trad. Do I. Lisboa: Instituto Superior Técnico, p. 180).

excluded in the perfect city of *The Republic* (Plato 2000). Vitruvius' treaty indicates a conception of the spectator vulnerable not only to emotional states transmitted by the actors but also to the environment; it implicates a direct connection with the natural and cosmic world under which laws the theatre should be built.

In what regards the transmission of affect in the theatre, the rhetoric of the passions prevails throughout the Renaissance, anchored in Galen's physiology that informs the understanding of emotions as humors, invocations and inspirations. Yet, if such knowledge corresponded to the interconnectedness of bodies and environment illuminated by the Greek and Roman amphitheaters, the shift to indoor representations would radically change it. As theatrical representations presented to the king's courts in Europe gradually moved into royal palaces, exchanges with the environment dramatically diminish. The open semi-circular arena gave rise to an enclosed rectangle where illusions of reality were produced by theatrical architecture and stage machinery. Only in the 18th century, with Diderot, will the work of the actor be considered as a craft on its own right and the transmission of affect slowly loose its validity.

Renaissance and Baroque theatrical innovations gesture towards the slow though enduring process of enclosing scenic space and enforce the consequent separation from the audience. In the Renaissance, the introduction of perspective and the proscenium arch envision the potentialities of mastering illusion in a black box, therefore, commanding the spectator's attention and overall experience. The stage becomes a painting, framed by the proscenium arch (hence, proscenium theatre), a representation of reality by means of the optic effect of depth and volume provided by perspective as long as it is looked at from an ideal frontal point – the prince's seat. Baroque architecture not only strengthened the Renaissance theatrical model, but also reconfigured the place of the spectator. It transformed open galleries into boxes and shaped a normative auditorium disposition to reinforce the increasing hierarchical regulation of theatre attendance and social conduct. The prince's view gave birth to the royal box in the new theatres constructed exclusively for the dramatic arts, since the 17th century, whereas the auditorium becomes a second stage for the display of social hierarchies. The opera, in particular, is the scenery of financial, romantic and social encounters, elected by the emergent bourgeoisie as the privileged site for the confirmation of its power.

Diderot and the paradox of (in)sensibility

Scientific developments in physics and physiology during the 17th century fuel the conditions for shifting acting paradigms, in the 18th century: from rhetoric to technique, from expressing to representing emotions, from transmitting affects to producing effects. This change is rooted in new conceptions of the world and the human body. In the wake of Newton's theory, the Universe is conceived as a mechanical system made of equally important pieces – celestial and terrestrial bodies –, which are subjected to the same laws of physics. Small machines within the big machine, all pieces are vital to keep the moving mechanism running. Needless to say, in this context, the concept of the human body as a machine became popular amongst philosophers and scientists who wanted to solve the puzzle: how to explain bodily expression of emotions in relation to the soul that animates it? Descartes' dualist doctrine, the prevailing philosophical and scientific premise in the West until very recently, postulates Reason (the Soul) is like a ghost that governs the body. The body-mind split promotes a move towards the internalization of emotion. The passions of the soul are conceived as an activity of the mind manifested in the body, a machine whose nervous system works in many ways similarly to electricity phenomena or acoustic vibrations (Roach 1985, 94). On the contrary, the doctrine of sensibility offers an account of the physiology of emotion rooted in the body as a mechanism gifted a vital energy. This immanent proposition suggests a crucial turn from a body as a membrane exposed to the environment to a body as an instrument to representing passions. The body of the actor is re-shaped as a machine ready to be trained and mastered.

Scientific theories were deeply influential in Denis Diderot's thought, providing the theoretical ground for the first great treaty on acting: *The paradox of the actor* (written in 1773, published in 1830). Editor-in-chief of the monumental project *Encyclopédie*, Diderot was the most erudite philosopher of his time. As Roach reminds us, without the physiological knowledge he devoted himself to, he would not have approached the work of the actor as a technique (Roach 1985, 117–8). For instance, the principle of dual consciousness requires the capacity of detaching mental experience from bodily manifestation of the character's emotions. Diderot advances the first physiological explanation of such capacity. The actor's mental force (reason) controls the body-machine while observing it at the same time. This conception is only possible when the nervous system is considered as a vibrating instrument – nerves are strings that vibrate – and the organs of the body thought of as autonomous

in its functioning. Like inner organs, the strings of sensibility can be activated separately, as the mind can choose what vibration to observe and reflect upon (*idem*, 148). For Diderot, the fundamental issue was discovering the mechanisms of sensibility, defined as a foundational faculty of the body to respond to stimuli, in order to master them. Here lies the secret of the perfect actor.

The more the actor knew the body's physiological processes, the better could he play the instrument. Thus, the actor's technical competence demands mastering bodily manifestations of emotions, which s/he generates in his mind and imagination, activating his nervous system. Such skills enable sudden changes in emotional expressions without affecting the actor himself. Legendary British actor David Garrick, a model of perfection for Diderot and many other of his contemporaries, was famous for excelling at these emotional shifts. But, what exactly is the paradox?

Il me faut dans cet homme un spectateur froid et tranquille; j'en exige, par conséquent, de la pénétration et nulle sensibilité, l'art de tout imiter, ou ce qui revient ou même, un égale aptitude à toutes sortes de caractères et rôles.
(Diderot 1996, 1830)

The paradox of the actor lies on Diderot's claim that representing emotions demands the complete absence of natural sensibility of the actor to feel them. The better he mastered his vibrating system, the less vulnerable he would be to accidental disruption. Only if the actor is impervious in life will he be able to generate the widest range of emotions on stage. Unlike the rhetoric of the passions, this new approach to acting introduces the question of representing emotions as a technique. Not surprisingly, acting treatises depicting images of facial expressions and bodily postures have proliferated since the 17th century (Roach 1985, 71). According to Diderot, the actor must study the physiological mechanisms of emotions in order to reproduce them on stage. He is supposed to imagine the character's ideal model in his mind to guide his interpretation, which implicates reproducing bodily expressions as emotional correlates of inner soul states, without feeling them. This theory is revolutionary for it creates the possibility of emotional mechanisms becoming automatic through repetition in rehearsals. As a consequence, highly artificial representations produce a powerful illusion of spontaneity, or it is perceived as such: the actor's thoughts and emotions become "second nature", in the words of Russian director Stanislavsky, who drew his actor training upon Diderot's premises.

To 17th and 18th century knowledge, sensibility works like vibrations and electricity. The latter inspired a prolific wave of theatrical metaphors, still echoing today. The vocabulary to describe the transmission of affect in the theatre is contaminated with the semantics of electricity. Energy, for instance, acquires a new meaning in the 18th century as a physical phenomenon; a natural force that surrounds bodies and can be channeled (idem, 102). Accordingly, the actor with a sparkle is able to profoundly impact on the spectator due to the mental force fueling his interpretation. Like an electrical shot, the actor projects emotions onto the spectator, “inflaming” him/her hearts (ibidem). In spite of representing emotions, actors still diffused their magic in a distance. Transmission was not yet unreasonable. Like electricity, magnetism provided powerful images to describe the presence of the actor, exerting an inexplicable attraction to audiences who sat more and more in a distance. Jane Goodall suggests that scientific infused metaphors are not totally magic or mysticism free, in the sense that they could not fully describe live performance phenomena but they were useful to cover up for institutional anxieties about contagion (Goodall 2008, 66). Reason could not objectively explain the emotional power of the actor over the increasingly wider auditoriums. Social transmission of affect was to be eradicated as a phenomenon because it was not coherent with an enlightened rationality, committed to dissect, experiment and prove all kinds of behavior and interaction with the world.

Technologies of separation

In modernity, issues of attention are closely connected to reconfigurations of the autonomy of the subject and social separation. Jonathan Crary outlines a genealogy of attention showing how its modern conception is indebted to new technologies, inventions and practices of watching and creating spectacle (Crary 1999, 2). It is not just a physiological phenomenon. Social and epistemological discourses and practices define the 19th century as a pivotal moment in western history, foreshadowing a conception of the subject separated from the world. At the core of these issues are strategies of isolation, deprived the subject from his power of action in the world. Through the manipulation of attention, these strategies shape, frame and control the subject. They are “technologies of separation” (idem, 74), which have far-reaching consequences to theatre making.

By the end of the 19th century, one main technology of separation emerges in the theatre in tune with the autonomy of modern subjectivity: the darkening of the auditorium, which perfected control of light and

illusion on stage, is implemented as the theatre norm. In addition, the naturalist concept of the 4th Wall reinforces the divide between “life” represented on stage and the observing audience. These innovations culminate the lengthy process of enclosure of scenic space that ensures the separation of stage and auditorium, therefore, the spectator’s passivity seating in the dark. As suggested before, the stage gradual confinement mirrors the modern subject’s self-containment insofar as the physical body now restrains emotions and the transmission of affect is definitely erased from scientific and philosophical discourses.

Wagner undertook pioneering reforms at the *Festspielhaus* theatre, in Bayreuth (1876), to create the necessary conditions for a “total artwork” (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). Integrating all the arts through dramatic representation, the “total artwork” requires the spectator’s total surrender. Technical innovations apply scientific improvements in manipulating the body’s physiology to foster a unified perception. Illusion should be flawless, therefore, the stage had to be detached from the auditorium. The Renaissance picture becomes a movie screen (Schivelbusch 1988, 220). Wagner reinforces the proscenium by adding a second arch, which furthered away the audience’s focal point, and sinks the orchestra pit, concealing the sound source to underline its spectral ambivalence. Wagner called this spatial interval that separated real world from ideal world the “mystic gulf” (Wagner apud Collier 1988, 32). Only distance could create the opposite effect: the spectator should abandon himself/herself entirely to the illusion on stage. This technology originates, thus, a separated spectator, deprived of action and disconnected from social and affective environment in the theatre.

This is the matrix of the modern spectator who “lives and breathes the work of art only”, forgetting that he is completely vulnerable at the theatre (Wagner apud Packer, Randall e Jordan 2002, 5–6). Moreover, the spectator must forget his body. When s/he is overwhelmed by the “vapors” of an ideal world, s/he engages in a transformative experience:

His seat once taken, he finds himself in an actual *theatron*, i.e., a room made ready for no other purpose than his looking in, and that for looking straight in front of him. Between him and the picture to be looked at there is nothing plainly visible, merely a floating atmosphere of distance, resulting from the architectural adjustment of the two proscenia; whereby the scene is removed as it were to the unapproachable world of dreams, while the spectral music sounding from the “mystic gulf”, like vapors rising from the holy womb of Gaia (...) (Wagner apud Collier 1988, 32–3)

Wagner envisioned a neutral auditorium, clean of adornments and signs of social hierarchies. On the one hand, he created a democratic space that granted good visibility from all seats equally and faded class privileges. Inseparable from a social cohesion program (cfr. Crary 1999, 247–8), a sense of social community in the audience grew at the cost of eradicating social distractions during the performance. On the other hand, Wagner realized that a full immersion in a dream-like world required complete concentration. He prohibited interruptions from the audience, such as applauding after an aria or the first entrance of the leading singer (Collier 1988, 33). Democratic auditoriums, thus, were not liberated social spaces but limiting containers. As a technology of separation, the total work of art aimed at utterly manipulating the attention of the spectator not at liberating it. The “4th Wall” would seal the actor to the stage.

The “total artwork” is contemporary to the crisis of illusionist theatre, to which the contrasting aesthetics of Symbolism and Naturalism responded. The first created barely human parabolic phantasmagoria; the second pushes illusion to the extreme of representing life “as it is”. Both movements anchor their aesthetic projects in Wagner’s widespread technology of separation to control the attention of the audience. Naturalism deepens the great divide between stage and auditorium by implementing the “4th Wall”, transforming the spectator into a passive witness set radically apart from the empowered actors. The 4th Wall is a theatrical convention that establishes an invisible wall – something imagined like a glass soundproof wall – between stage and audience, closing up the stage entirely. It assumes an absorbed acting style: actors pretending not only they are living (not representing) their roles but also not to notice there is an audience in front of them. The telling images of an audience watching the play as if looking through the keyhole and the actor performing a “slice of life” were popular at the time (Bablet 1977, 18). Theatre is a new laboratory for observing social behavior. A wall divides the space of light from the space of darkness, the space of action from the space of idleness, the space of power from the space of subjection. Fundamentally incompatible with notions of the transmission of affect, the modern subjectivity of the “observer” shapes, thus, the condition of the spectator as a *voyeur*.

Emile Zola endeavored to transform the dramatic arts in light of the scientific spirit of his time. Unequivocally, a positivist foundation crops up in the principles of naturalist representation: only scientific (observation, measurement and demonstration) could provide accurate knowledge of human behavior. What theatre could offer were replicas of the material and social scenarios of conduct. In *Le Naturalisme au théâtre*, Zola claims such a

stunning goal suggesting thorough reformations in theatrical conventions (text, costumes, acting or scenography). The author urged to portraying the “physiological man” (instead of the “metaphysical man”) for his mechanisms and systems can now be measured and tested as well as his hereditary and environmental conditionings (Zola 1923, 124, *passim*). Therefore, if the actor wants to represent life in all its simplicity and veracity, the new actor must study it. Truth was the new essence of theatre and scenography was crucial to display a realistic set that would not compromise the rigor of the experiment. The stage becomes, thus, a test tube to reproduce social behavior objectively, allowing for audience critical examination of moral and ethical implications of such behavior within the matching social environment. Distance was crucial to such verification.

At the Moscow Art Theatre, Stanislavski drew the most influential acting theory and method (“the method”, as it became known) of the 20th century upon similar physiological premises and principles of truth. Russian actor and director reinforced notions of authenticity and believing as fundamental to realistic representations. To interpret a character the actor has to “live” the role, not letting it affect him/her. For Stanislavski, the actor’s “emotion memory” was a crucial tool to fabricate truthful actions on stage, therefore, an illusion of real life experienced spontaneously on stage. Amongst other technical trainings, the actor should listen to emotional resonances of his/her personal experience (life situations of feelings) where he could anchor both psychological and bodily triggers to play his part with repeated brilliance. Following the legacy of Diderot’s paradoxical actor, Stanislavsky develops a method to which invocation of emotion memories and repetition of physical actions is key. The body’s memory can either be prompted to make emotions resurface as bodily responses or, conversely, archive these bodily responses as emotional triggers. Training the body meant training emotion response and vice-versa.

Although at first this might remind us of Freud’s theories of the unconscious, Roach reminds us that Stanislavsky’s system is directly influenced by his contemporary’s psychophysiological theories: Pavlov (Roach 1985, 205). Reflexes are understood as a mechanism of adaptation of the body. Pavlov demonstrated that at the base of reflex behavior lie deep connections between the mind and the body that can be conditioned through repetition. Stanislavsky sets the task of mastering and manipulating these mechanisms for the actor to build a character. Conditioning body reflexes make real the possibility of an encompassing “lived through” rhythm that sustains a complete illusion of spontaneity. In Stanislavsky’s words: “Habit creates second nature, which is a second reality.” (Stanislavski apud Roach 1985, 213)

Inside the body lie the mechanisms to generate emotions. In the method, the actor can devise guidelines for his character behavior, an inner model automatized by the body through the improvisation of physical actions. If each action has a correlate to a psychic and emotional state, this method allows the actor to use his body to reach/induce and reproduce them. Stanislavsky's ultimate goal was the reproduction of "the inner life of the character he is portraying". This phrasing gives us a clear picture of the modern self-contained subjectivity: emotions are of the body and lived in the body as our own, therefore, impermeable to flowing affects. Needless to say, such notion is anchored in modern theories of emotion. Darwin's groundbreaking theory paved the way for the long-standing 20th conceptions of emotion confined to the human body and psyche: William James's definition of emotions as perceptions of bodily states, subsequently processed by the conscious mind and Freud's theory of the unconscious, the mental space where emotions emerge as energy to be expressed/ experienced by the body. This framework provides an idea of emotions in direct connection bodily perceptions and psychic energy; therefore, the body outlines identity.

Reenacting the transmission of affect in contemporary practices

In a highly provocative fashion, the avant-garde movements of the beginning of the 20th century and the emergence of Performance Art in the 60s/70s break with aesthetic conventions and pull down invisible walls. Modernism challenges ideas of context, authorship and materials in a strong critique of representation deeply entangled with political commitment. In the theatre, dramatic texts compromised narrative and character identification (*Ubu Roi*, by Alfred Jarry, for egg.), new concepts of scenic space reorganized the relation with the audience (the Bauhaus, for egg.) and acting techniques thrived (Meyerhold's biomechanics, for egg.). The blurring of borders was the order of the day. Not only artists believed aesthetic paradigms were stale but also were they defective in light of art foreseen in fluid interconnection with life. Theatre's 4th wall was the epitome of separation and power discourses; hence, the perfect target for avant-gardist fierce attacks. Both as an aesthetic and political response to passivity, the avant-garde aimed at overcoming the gap between stage and audience by directly provoking the spectator in the theatre or by literally finding for new audiences outside the building. Futurist *Serate* and variety theatre, as well as Dadaist and Surrealist cabarets, staged outrageous battlefields to provoke the bourgeois spectator. If s/he

was asleep in his seat, delighted with theatrical effects, the avant-garde sought to wake him/her up to the political intervention of art in building a new society. It was a declaration of war to the modern notion of passivity.

Particularly in the US, Japan and Europe, Performance Art disruptive format boomed in the 60s/70s from the provocative legacies from modernist actions. This is the most influential moment for the upcoming generations. Performance Art is an “unmatrixed” genre, as Michael Kirby coined it (Kirby 1965, 21). It does neither create nor function within the conventional matrixes of time, place and character of the theatre. Performance Art does not refer to fictional time or place; it does not represent characters; it does not tell us a story. As the term “unmatrixed” suggests, the borders of this new territory are blurry for its main purpose was to transgress artistic conventions, pushing its material and contextual boundaries to the edge, and to engage in a transformative experience unmediated by representation⁴.

The body and the audience are at the center of inquiry of these self-reflexive practices. On the one hand, performance artists explored the body to question issues of identity – individual, social, gender, ethnic and political. It became a tool, a canvas, and a medium of expression producing a specific kind of knowledge that unfolded layers of cultural and social constructions. The body has a language of its own (Vergine 2000). Allowing for it to resurface, improvisation techniques became a popular method to a critical and self-reflexive approach to determinist conceptions of the body. Performance undermines the perfect match between biology and identity. On the other hand, performances were carefully conceived in order to involve the spectator in the action, including him as a collaborator, sometimes even as a co-creator. The emphasis on the actual shared moment and space, the “here and now” of performance as opposed to theatrical ontological separation, produced a radical change in audience engagement as well as reactivated notions of affective transmission.

Participatory strategies were a means of dismissing the audience entirely, which, according to Allan Kaprow, the inventor of the happenings, was mandatory to eradicate the last traits of theatrical convention of live performance. As early as 1966, Kaprow announced: “the audience must be eliminated completely” (Kaprow 1966, 195). No audience meant, of course, having no observers. Kaprow called for participants in his happenings, rather than spectators, to accomplish the fusion of art and life to create meaningful

⁴ For a retrospective mapping of Performance Art’s main features and developments cfr. (FÉRAL, 1992)

experiences through art works. Yet, what happens when representation is cast out from the stage? What happens when the actor presents himself/herself on stage instead of representing a character? What happens when the spectator is encouraged to participate in the action directly, self-conscious of his role in the event?

Participating, interacting, (re) activating affect

Let's have a break and remember the last time you were at the theatre. Remember what kind of performance you've attended. Were you sitting in the auditorium or were you asked to ramble your way in the piece? Was the performance even in a theatre building? Were you in doubt whether performers were representing a character or "being themselves"? Were you unsure whether some things were part of the show or not? Were actors addressing the audience directly? Did they invite you to join them? Each of you will have different memories according to your taste and experience as theatregoers. However, none of these options will seem unlikely to you. The reason for this lies in the multiplicity of conventions and aesthetics that co-exist in contemporary performing practices. From a Broadway show to an underground performance, one can enjoy an array of theatre architectures, acting styles and spectator's roles. Distinctively of our times is the widening of a blurry area where the historical association between spatial organization and notions of affect transmission is not a direct one. I shall briefly draw your attention to how ideas of participation and interaction are engrained in contemporary theatre practices.

Performance Art reopens a contact zone between audience and performers that radically influences notions of acting, spectatorship and affect transmission. The contemporary actor often presents himself onstage as "himself", aiming at being present in the "here and now" of the theatrical situation. For that purpose, he focuses on performing assigned tasks in the most rigorous way possible and in making decisions on the spot. Renowned American company Wooster Group has been making performances anchored in "scenic personae" or the personal display of the actor as himself on stage since 1975 (Auslander 2002, 307). They emerge during the rehearsal process both from the tasks or activities performed and from the specific actors involved in the work. Instead of representing actions on stage, usually in the context of a dramatic storyline, the contemporary actor aims at performing actions purposefully as possible but without a narrative. Such a tiny detail makes a huge difference in the style of acting. Willem Dafoe, a longtime collaborator, has a scenic persona that

emerges and evolves in rehearsals. He acts himself out, stretching the borders of reality and fiction. When performing with the Wooster Group, what mattered to him was not the interpretation of a role but “reenacting decisions” that came through the creative process. In his own words: “it’s about being it and doing it” (Auslander 2002, 308–9). Spontaneity resurfaces here not as a goal in itself but rather as a result of a task-based aesthetics, which welcomes and incorporates accidental events or individual states of mind (and states of heart). This kind of theatre produces a self-conscious spectator. In the midst of a playful ambivalence the audience has to make decisions: is it real or fictional?

Ambiguity is key to post-dramatic theatre. German theoretician Hans Thies-Lehmann famously coined as post-dramatic practices that take up performance art strategies to disrupt theatrical categories as well as the status of the spectator (Lehmann 2006). Post-dramatic theatre creates a territory of autonomy and responsibility for the spectator in which decision-making processes rise as the corollary of a critical ambiguity. The term refers to a set of operations of deconstruction, fragmentation and juxtaposition undertaken by those practices, not to a moment “after” dramatic text. Lehmann argues that drama is present in this kind of performances because it challenges its structures and categories while dislocating text as a working material from its traditional logocentric site. Post-dramatic theatre shatters fundamental categories of Aristotelian drama – time, place, text, characters, action – giving rise to self-reflexive performances engaged in questioning issues of representation, audience engagement and theatrical apparatus. Strategies such as repetition, expansion, fragmentation or simultaneous actions reconfigured expressive qualities of materials and creative processes. For instance, time is no longer referring to dramatic action but promoting an experience in itself. As durational performances by Marina Abramovic or the UK based Company Forced Entertainment exemplary demonstrate, the passing of time is crucial to the aesthetic experience of these artists’ work⁵. Contracting time in repetitive sequences or expanding it into unthinkable periods, they push temporal limits of live performance.

Let us take one of Forced Entertainment’s most famous show – *Quizoola!* (1996). For 6 hours, two performers share the stage – an area depicted by light bulbs on the floor. They endure a monumental quiz of 2000 scripted

⁵ Marina Abramovic longest performance is *The Artist is present* (2010). In this retrospective exhibition at the MoMA (NY), Abramovic sat on a chair at the ground-floor entry hall for three months during the museum opening hours as people lined up to sit opposite to her. Forced Entertainment shows can last from 2 to 24 hours.

questions answering them in turns of improvisation while the audience is free to come in and out of the room. Issues range from the personal to the political, from philosophy to everyday, from funny to harsh and the spectator can never be sure if questions are addressed to the performer or to his "scenic persona", therefore, s/he can never be sure if they are answered according to the former's biography or beliefs or rather to those of the latter. Although they will answer in the first person, the spectator has no clue whatsoever about who is the speaking subject or what is real or fictional. Likewise, there is no point in looking for true or fake emotions. The contrast between the performer's blurred clown make up faces and their everyday clothes signal the prevalent contradiction that challenges audience responses. Spectators are addressed only through visual contact. Yet, they are part of space of interaction as their thoughts, internal answering of questions, emotional or memory associations and laughter (which is quite expected in this show) influence the atmosphere in the room and the tone of *complicité* conveyed by the performers to the audience. Unlike the realist absorbed acting, post-dramatic performers acknowledge the audience. If a spectator sneezes, the actor may react to it. S/he is receptive to the unpredictability of the moment and plays with it. S/he makes explicit his awareness of the audience, which, in turn, makes the audience self-conscious about being at the theatre. It also puts the audience in an ambiguous place, in the midst of playful ambivalence between fiction and reality, compelling the spectator to make decisions.

Rather than watching a structured sequence of events, the spectator is confronted with unclear situations, enigmatic characters and simultaneous actions that force him/her to make decisions. S/he is granted a new autonomy and responsibility. Seated or wondering about in a space, the post-dramatic spectator makes choices about the performance: whatever he will be paying attention to will depict his/her own performance. Dialogue shifts from a conversation within the stage to a conversation between performers and audience. As Lehmann reminds us, the reality of theatrical situations happens between stage and audience, thus, in a space of interaction. While the actor focuses his attention on the "here and now" of the situation, the audience responds with mental and emotional reactions, thereby participating in what actually happens (Lehmann 2006, 136).

Can we unpack underlying propositions at stake in contemporary conceptions interaction and participation? The first seems to be rooted in the notion of the body as interdependent and co-constituted by the environment in a continual process; the second implies a notion of perception as action or simulated action, a cognitive and sensorial mapping of the territory in real

time. Both notions resonate with recent neuroscience findings about the plasticity of the brain and studies of emotions as neural functions that reposition the debate on mutual influence and interdependency⁶.

Not only were the 60s/70s fraught in art experiments, but also in philosophical paradigms and critical theory. Post structuralism initiated a fraught critique of the subject's Cartesian model emphasizing the complexity of cultural factors involved in human experience and power discourses that pre-determine it. As the idea of an embodied mind gained popularity, both in the humanities and in science, the emphasis on a two-way connection and influence with the environment changed the conceptions of behavior. The body arose as a nodal point of a complex circulation of information – neural, emotional, psychic, and cultural – rather than the site of origin of such engagement with the outer world. Neuroscience studies on perception helped disseminating this new conception.

Perception has been reassessed as a cognitive and sensorial activity, reconfiguring notions of passivity traditional attributed to bodily perceptions. Instead of a passive receptacle of stimuli from the environment, the body is currently conceived as taking part in a co-evolving process with the environment. Thus, perception emerges as a multisensory interaction with the outer world. This approach benefits from the groundbreaking discovery of mirror-neurons by Rizzolatti and Gallese, in 1996. Providing striking evidence that the same neurons fire whether we perform an action or when we see someone else performing it, this research points to the inherent activity of perception. In tandem with the discovery of brain's plasticity – the brain's capacity for changing neural pathways as a consequence of behavior and experience, and vice-versa –, these findings shake formerly credited assumptions of body-mind, active-passive, emotional-neural dichotomies.

From a neural point of view, there is no difference between doing and observing an action, as perception receives and interprets information. Conversely, from a bodily point of view, there is no difference between a true or false neural mapping as it is always an experience happening in the body. Hence, in contemporary post-dramatic theatre the blurring of borders between reality and fiction, true or false, theatricality and performativity in a space of

⁶ Although theory and practice dialogues, in particular with science, have been the touchstone of contemporary experiences in the arts for the last twenty years, I am not implying that there is a direct influence between neuroscience and theatrical conceptions. The aim here is to flag the possibility of recognizing an underlying, perhaps not purposeful, syntonetic attunement between conceptual premises in performance and science.

interaction echoes the intrinsic dynamics of doing and perceiving, in the body and in the mind. It is as if post-dramatic actors interweave truth and falseness, acting and observing while performing in the same fashion that the brain molds and is molded by experience. Contrary to extracting a second nature from automatic repetition of actions according to a model of perfection and separation, the post-dramatic actor plays with boundaries of reality and fiction in order to be in the present, displace representation and incorporate the spectator in an ambiguous territory of multiple interactions.

This is also related to current notions of perception as modes of action. Alain Berthoz and Alva Nöe are two stimulating authors to mention here because their research highlights decision-making and bodily knowledge as activities. Berthoz postulates that perception is a simulated action in the brain that involves a judgment and decision (Berthoz 1997, 15). Bearing a proactive conception of the brain, that is, considering that the brain can analyze and evaluate context coherently, Berthoz proposes a sense of movement to explain how we anticipate the consequences of actions. This extra sense, Berthoz sustains, is responsible for internal simulations that capture global configurations of gestures and events, preparing us for acting upon the world. Perception, thus, collects and interprets various sources of information. This speaks to Nöe's approach of perception as an active competence of the body.

Alva Nöe maintains that sensorimotor bodily processes are at the core of perception. Reacting to neurobiological theories that focus on brain phenomena, Nöe lays the emphasis on the senses and on bodily experience as what provides the intrinsic ability to perceive. The author claims that perception is a mode of knowledge both sensorial and conceptual because, not only the body mediates our experience but also can it be reflected upon. Nöe suggests that perception is a mode of acting and thinking anchored in bodily experience (Nöe 2004, 3). Acting and thinking, he further suggests, are forms of knowledge identical in kind though distinct in degree of connection / engagement with the world that happens through the movement of life⁷.

It makes sense to envision the contemporary spectator as a participant in a space of interaction through a perception of movement (and its effects on the body) that activates potential action in the theatrical situation. In 1974, Marina Abramovic confronted the audience with the possibility of doing anything

⁷ These concepts greatly resonate with the work of theatre scholar Josette Féral on reception and on the "performative actor" (2008). Putting an emphasis on the activity of contemporary theatre rather than on its relation to drama - as in Lehmann's concept of the post-dramatic - Féral highlights the performative aspects of new practices. Although to my knowledge this contribution to theatre theory is not translated into English, I find it worth mentioning.

they wanted with objects laying on a table, from a bullet and a gun to a feather. *Rhythm 0* is a radical example of a challenge to the spectator's simulated action for it can actually result in political and ethical definite decisions, especially to the artist herself. Artistic situations like this prompt the audience to process information coming from various sources, which demands both acting and thinking. They start making decisions with their bodies at the same time (or before) the meaning of their decisions and of the experience itself arises. Whatever they decide will have consequences on the unfolding of the performance, whether or not they take directly part in the situation. Thus, ideas of participation in post-dramatic theatre are in tune with an "enactive approach" of perception as a way of processing, interpreting and dealing with the environment through sensorial contact. Participation is acting and thinking in the contact zone of the performance.

In addition, from the moment emotions are researched as biological functions of the nervous system, that is, as functions of the brain, we cannot consider them neither as mere physiological states nor through a reductionist stimuli-response logic (Ledoux 1996, 12). Contrary to previous paradigms, neuroscience and neurobiology approach emotions with a conception of the brain deeply entangled with bodily states, a brain that works as translator between sensorial knowledge, felt emotions and consciousness. It develops neural patterns for emotions to travel; conversely, emotions interfere with and change neural patterns. Contrary to previous views, the brain changes throughout a person's life. Dominant concept in science and the humanities, plasticity is the capacity of the brain to change and adapt to context through experience.

According to French philosopher Catherine Malabou, whose research has been questioning the philosophical and cultural implications of the concept, plasticity is both a potentiality for constancy (preserving the organism) as much as for creation (changing the organism) (Malabou 2008, 74). Change, the author notes, is a consequence of the tension between these two aspects that resist to each other. In contemporary theatre, one could say, the actor adapts and reacts to the here-now of the performance. In the shared space of interaction, the actor both gives form to the performance (scripted performance) and receives form from the audience (participant spectator). In such process, he needs to manage levels of representation (of a character) and performativity (of himself-on-stage) that resist to each other. Theatrical playfulness arises from these different kinds of resistance.

In conclusion, contemporary scientific concepts resonate with theatrical ideas of a space of interaction and of a participant spectator. The exposure of both actor and spectator to a space of interaction makes salient questions

of interdependency and suggests the plastic condition of the brain. Directly engaged with the environment, the actor listens to the audience and makes decisions, while the spectator's participation can be thought of as active in the sense that all his/her perception/action have an influence in the actors' performance, thus, in the aesthetics of the theatrical event itself. Contrary to the model that aims at transmitting (and representing) emotions to the spectator, the post-dramatic actor allows for affects to unfold during the here and now, in his play of ambiguity between reality and fiction.

In this way, many performances reactivate a reciprocal movement of affect with the audience that resonates with the ancient notion of receptivity and the body as a process of exchange with the environment. But these contemporary spaces of interaction neither derive necessarily from the use of theatrical space as a dividing wall nor from direct participation of the spectator in the performance. The emphasis on porous and ambiguous boundaries instead of on a clear division of spaces focused on the production of effects blurs the idea of participation itself. To participate is to take part, to be in the event or action. The spectator's passivity – receiving / responding / creating / intensifying an affective atmosphere – takes part in the unfolding of the theatrical event itself. Affect theory, Brennan's model of transmission of affect in particular, allows us to think of spectator's participation both as a social and an aesthetic process, as an intensification of the circulation of affect that impacts on performers on stage. Significantly, this understanding of participation indicates the value such practices of feeling place on the affective dimension of live performance, specifically, on affect transmission as impacting the unfolding of the event. Contemporary performance create worlds of affect that recuperate notions of transmission of affect, embedded in the cultural and scientific moment we are now living, hinting at the ethical and political responsibility of creating worlds of affect.

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